THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (b) Workload on our missions in the Gulf has increased over the years commensurate with increase in the strength of the indian community working there, enhancement of bilateral trade, services and a greater measure of political contacts.

Staff strength in all our Missions abroad remains under contant review; it is evaluated professionally.

(c) The Government of Saudi Arabia has not yet consented to be opening of our Consulate in Dammam. However, our Mission in Riyadh sends consular teams, every week to Dammam to provide passport and other consular services to the Indian community in the area.

Negative Growth Rate of Agricultural Production

*468. SHRI PREM CHAND: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that food production for 1999-2000 is expected to decline from 203.04 Million Ton in 1998-99 to 199.06 Million Ton in 1999-2000;

(b) whether the area under cultivation has reduced from 125.36 hectares to 123.31 hectares;

(c) whether the yield per hectare is expected to drop from 1620 to 1615; and

(d) if so, what steps Government have taken to ensure a positive growth rate during this financial year?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SUNDAR LAL PATWA): (a) to (c) The area, production and yield of foodgrains during 1998-1999 vis-a-vis 1999-2000 is given in the following table:

(Area in Million Heactares)
(Production in Million Tonnes)
(Yield rate in Kg/Hectare)

Agriculture Parameter	1998-99	1999-2000*
Area	125.36	123.16
Production	203.04	201.56
Yield	1620	1637

*Advance estimates as on 27.03.2000

Although both area and production during 1999-2000 are likely to decline compared to last year, the yield rate is expected to increase marginally.

(d) To increase production and productivity of foodgrains in the country, the Government is implementing centrally sponsored integrated Cereal Development Programmes in rice/wheat/coarse cereals Based Cropping System Area, National Pulses Development Project etc. Under these programmes/project, incentives are provided to farmers for use of high yielding varieties of seeds application of integrated pest management, propagation of scientific water management including micro irrigation and use of improved farm implements. Research is also being continuoulsy undertaken to develop improved technologies so as to enhance the productivity and production of foodgrains in India. Field demonstrations on farmers' holding including training of farmers and farm labourers is being organised for effective transfer of technology.

Justification of Clinton's Pakistan Visit

*469. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item which appeared in the Hindustan Times dated 9th March, 2000, captioned ""US justifies decision of Clinton to visit Pakistan", and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) It was Government's consistent position that it is the prerogative of visiting heads of state to choose their itinerary as also decide his/their programme.